

Testimony Before the Human Services Committee

Public Hearing on Friday March 4, 2011

Subject: Governors Bill No. 1012 - An act implementing the Governors budget recommendations concerning the transfer of functions from the Board of Education and Services for the Blind and the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired to the Departments of Education and Social Services.

My name is Venetta MacBeth and I am here today to ask for you to deny the passing of the Governors Bill No. 1012, An act Implementing the Governors budget recommendations concerning the transfer of functions from the Board of Education and Services for the Blind and the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired to the Departments of Education and Social Services. I would like to offer my appreciation to the members of the Human Services Committee for granting me an opportunity to share my views regarding this bill.

I am testifying not only for myself, but for all those who deem the services received from the Board of Education and Services for the Blind invaluable. I am legally blind and I am a first year student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. I entered the field of social work to be able to help others. I have been a recipient of services from BESB since early childhood and they have been my rock ever since then. If it were not for their services, I may not have been able to thrive in my academic career and in my personal life as I have. The Board and Education and Services for the Blind has provided yearly visual evaluations which assess what visual aids I may need to function in home school and career; they have connected me to services like books on tape and large print books; they have advocated for me when I have had any problem in school related to my vision; connected me with other agencies that help persons who are blind or legally blind and they have backed me financially in college previously, and presently in graduate school. Not only have they helped me with tuition, but they have also helped me with books and classroom supplies. Many of the successes in my life are in part due to the services provided by BESB.

The Board of Education and Services for the Blind have a deeper understanding of the services needed for blind persons. They are, for the most part, trained Social Workers who have a vast knowledge of what daily stressors face those who are blind or legally blind and they know how to help them not only cope with their circumstances, but to be self sufficient, productive, tax paying members of society. In addition to that, they also provide help for the recently blind to become reacclimated with their surroundings and to eventually be able to become self sufficient once again. They also connect blind persons with Seeing Eye dog facilities and training if they so choose. BESB will send a representative to home, school, or work to help get the services needed when the job simply cannot be done from behind a desk. They provide adaptive technology to help people with tasks that would be too difficult, if not impossible to perform for someone who is blind or legally blind, without assistance. The fact that BESB workers can come to your home is especially important for those who are newly blind and are unable to travel on their own and may not have a support system in place to help them commute to a central office in the inner city.

If BESB is transferred to the Department of Social Services I am certain that the depth of service that they are able to provide to the blind population at present will be lost. The inner workings and the level of service that is provided by the Department of Social Services is not sufficient for a population that has so many specific needs. The expertise, advocacy and empathy that are needed by blind persons will be lacking at the Department of Social Services and are best served by BESB.

I urge the committee to consider the impact that transferring the Board of Education and Services for the Blind to the Department of Social Services would have on the blind population. Please consider what I have said to you today, and deny the passing of Governors Bill No.1012. Thank you for your time.